



What to do about Darfur?

By U.S. Sen. John Cornyn

Sudan is Africa's largest country. The Nile River starts its northern flow to the Mediterranean at the confluence of the White Nile and Blue Nile rivers, near the Sudanese capital of Khartoum.

But the life-giving majesty of the world's longest river contrasts with the horror and tragedy that have plagued Sudan since it gained independence from Egypt and Great Britain in 1956.

Conflict based on ethnic, racial and religious differences has wracked the country from its inception. War, famine and disease have led to an estimated two million deaths, and created some four million homeless refugees over two decades.

Today, the deadly civil war in Darfur, a western region in Sudan roughly the size of Texas, has become the world's most dire human rights and humanitarian crisis.

Since 2003, at least 300,000 men, women and children have been killed, and some 2.2 million people—approximately one-third of Darfur's population—have been terrorized and driven from their homes.

Villages are burned routinely, and survivors are usually forced into refugee camps where they depend on international assistance to survive. But relief operations delivering food and water to the region are often turned back by violence. This summer alone, 21 supply vehicles were hijacked and 12 humanitarian workers were killed.

We are all too aware of casualties in Iraq and Afghanistan, but many Americans are largely oblivious to this genocide in an African region less than 1,500 miles from Baghdad.

Even while we have attempted to coax African countries and the United Nations into more effective intervention, President George W. Bush has led an aggressive U.S. response to the Darfur atrocities. In the past three years, the United States has provided more than \$1.4 billion in humanitarian assistance to Darfur victims. We have provided more than 85 percent of the food distributed this year, and contributed \$300 million to support 34 base camps for peacekeeping forces, along with maintenance, communications, training and airlift support.

Diplomatically, we are pushing the UN, Europe, African Union and others to devise an effective solution for peace. In December, after meeting with the President's newly appointed Special Envoy to Sudan, Andrew Natsios, I co-sponsored a Senate Resolution demanding that the Sudanese government either comply with mandates from the international community,

to include allowing a fortified UN peacekeeping force in the region, or face serious consequences.

In the meantime, to supplement governments' work, private efforts, including several based in Texas, have emerged. One group in Midland has received national and international acclaim for its efforts to raise public awareness about suffering in Darfur.

The New Yorker, National Review, Christian Science Monitor and American Spectator publications all have spotlighted the work of a Christian human-rights activist organization known as the Midland Ministerial Alliance.

"There is a strong Texas contingent that has really been outspoken on Sudan issues," said Sam Bell of the non-profit Genocide Intervention Network. He said his group's "hall of fame" includes the religious community of Midland, where several churches have established sister congregations in southern Sudan.

At home and in Darfur, the group has staged fundraisers for Sudanese schools, led a vigorous letter-writing campaign here and in Sudan, and hosted Sudanese exiles in Midland.

In Dallas, the congregation of Temple Emanu-El helps spearhead "Operation Dolls for Darfur," which raises awareness about the crisis through the sales of Guatemalan "worry doll" lapel pins, and other grassroots efforts.

Today, most Americans are only vaguely aware of the genocide in Darfur. The horror is occurring in a remote country, and the central government has effectively excluded international news media from covering the crisis.

But any effective campaign to alleviate suffering in Darfur must start with public awareness—both to educate the public and pressure the Sudanese government for a resolution. The individual efforts of our fellow Texans to achieve these goals provide an inspiring example for us all.

Sen. Cornyn is a member of the following Senate Committees: Armed Services, Judiciary, Budget, Small Business and Entrepreneurship, and Joint Economic. He is the chairman of the subcommittees on Immigration, Border Security and Citizenship and Emerging Threats and Capabilities. Cornyn served previously as Texas Attorney General, Texas Supreme Court Justice and Bexar County District Judge.

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